



Australian Hypnotherapists' Association

Submission to

ACCC:

Report to Senate

on

Private Health Insurance

20 September 2012

ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN HYPNOTHERAPISTS' ASSOCIATION

With over 800 members the Australian Hypnotherapists' Association (AHA) forms the largest group of professional clinical hypnotherapists in Australia. Its members practice in both the private and public sectors complementing other modalities, with many members working closely with doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists and other health service providers.

Formed in 1949 and incorporated in 1956 the AHA is seen as the premier professional body for professional clinical hypnotherapists in Australia. In 1999 the association published the second edition of its standards book titled "A Set of Competency and Proficiency Standards for Australian Professional Clinical Hypnotherapists". This work is in the National Library in Canberra as well as in a number of university libraries around the world. Consequently it has been recognised throughout the profession in Australian and internationally as a de-facto standard for the training of clinical hypnotherapists.

The AHA has worked toward uniform standards of practice, raising training standards and encouraging registration of the profession for more than 60 years and provides on-going professional development around the practice of hypnotherapy, supervision and accountability for its members.

The AHA also maintains a public register, the National Hypnotherapists Register of Australia (NHRA), of qualified hypnotherapists that meet AHA standards. This online register is a public resource enabling members of the public to choose a fully qualified specialist hypnotherapist with confidence.

SECTION ONE - ABOUT THIS SUBMISSION

The AHA welcomes the opportunity to comment on "*practices by health funds or providers which reduce the extent of health cover for consumers and increase their out-of-pocket medical or other expenses.*"

The AHA has for many years worked with other bodies within the profession with a view to addressing inconsistent recognition by health funds of the services provided by well trained qualified hypnotherapists under the supervision of an accrediting association.

SECTION TWO – INCONSISTENT RECOGNITION AND REBATES FOR SERVICES

Examples where allied health care providers offer the same or similar services as other providers and are not recognised by health funds

At this time approximately half of the health funds operating in Australia have no rebate for hypnotherapy services regardless of whether the service is provided by a Clinical Hypnotherapist or a Clinical Psychologist. Of the remaining health funds that offer a rebate for hypnotherapy services, a small number will do so for hypnotherapists trained and supervised in accordance with industry standards while the remaining health funds rebate only when such services are provided by Psychologists regardless of the amount of formal

hypnotherapy training they may or may not have undertaken. These funds include: AHM, MBF Australia, BUPA, HBA and others. This results in a significant competitive disadvantage for our well trained Clinical Hypnotherapists.

In AHA discussions with the various private health providers no consistent or compelling reasoning has been given for this inconsistent policy. For example, BUPA currently offers rebates for hypnotherapy services in the UK but the same organisation will not do so in Australia despite the AHA having higher standards of training and professional supervision requirements for its members than is required of hypnotherapists in the UK.

Historical reasons for inconsistency:

In each instance referred to, whether this lack of recognition is warranted. In particular, are there any regulatory, medical or other reasons for this lack of recognition?

In the view of the AHA this lack of consistency resulting in competitive disadvantage stems from the following reasons:

1. The historical reality is that the use of hypnosis was governed by differing legislation in the various States. All States have now repealed the relevant legislation removing any restriction on the use of hypnotherapy as there was no evidence to indicate that hypnotherapy practiced by a non medical practitioner posed any danger to the public.

There are therefore no regulatory reasons for lack of recognition of trained and supervised hypnotherapists who are in a recognised overseeing National Association that can ensure their ongoing competence and professionalism.

2. There is currently an erroneous idea that Psychologists, are better trained in the use of hypnosis. The AHA requires all members to have a minimum of 500 hours of hypnotherapy training while in most psychology training courses hypnotherapy is only an elective. Where it is compulsory, this training rarely exceeds 40 hours. In all other respects such as ongoing professional development and professional supervision Psychologist's requirements are equal to those required of Clinical Hypnotherapists who are members of the AHA. In addition AHA members operate under a strict and enforceable code of ethics which prevents them from treating any person unless adequately trained in the method of treatment for the presenting problem. Members are encouraged to refer on any patient who needs more specialist treatment.

There are no medical reasons for lack of recognition of hypnotherapists that are trained and under the supervision of a nationally recognised accrediting association.

Although state governments removed any restrictions because they found no adequate reason to continue restricting the practice of clinical hypnotherapy to Psychologists alone, many health funds continue to apply these out-dated restrictions putting qualified Clinical Hypnotherapists at an severe competitive disadvantage. This action certainly reduces choice for many members of the public seeking hypnotherapy treatment.

SECTION THREE – COMPETITIVE DISADVANTAGE

Whether this lack of recognition places allied health care providers at a competitive disadvantage. If so, how are allied health care providers disadvantaged by the practices of health funds?

The actions and inconsistent policies of the various health funds, places specialist Clinical Hypnotherapists at a significant competitive disadvantage in comparison with Psychologists, often with less experience, offering a limited hypnotherapy service as an adjunct to their normal services.

In a climate of economic uncertainty the income of many well trained specialist Clinical Hypnotherapists has been considerably reduced as it would appear that for mainly financial reasons, more patients are now seeking treatment by providers that are recognised by their health funds to enable them to get some form of rebate.

In addition to the impact health fund policies have on individual practitioners and the hypnotherapy profession as a whole, consumers of health services are also significantly financially disadvantaged with many being forced to choose a provider who is not covered by their health fund or a provider who may use hypnotherapy as an adjunct to their normal practice and thus may have less training and experience than might be optimal.

The inconsistency in health fund policy may also foster in consumers the erroneous belief that specialist Clinical Hypnotherapists are less qualified than Psychologists in the specialist modality of hypnotherapy because they are not recognised by many health funds. As such the standing and reputation of Clinical Hypnotherapists is considerably lessened by this practice.

SECTION FOUR – DETRIMENTAL EFFECT TO CONSUMERS

Whether this lack of recognition results in a reduction in the extent of health cover or an increase in the out-of-pocket medical expenses of consumers, If so, what is the detriment or loss suffered by consumers?

The inconsistent application of health fund policy results in significant financial disadvantage to consumers. To take advantage of their private health insurance, consumers must select a therapist regardless of their training who is recognised by their health fund, this often necessitates them having more out of pocket expenses even if they are in the very highest level of extras cover. Should they choose to see a Clinical Hypnotherapist not recognised by the health fund instead of a Psychologist, their out of pocket expenses would not be covered at all.

In choosing financial gain it is likely that the consumer will be treated by a therapist with less than optimal training in hypnotherapy resulting in a potential disadvantageous outcome to the patient.

SECTION FIVE – DESIRED OUTCOME

It is the view of the Australian Hypnotherapists Association that private health funds should provide a rebate to their customers for hypnotherapy services when that service is provided by suitably qualified and supervised practitioners. These practitioners should be either Clinical Psychologists or Clinical Hypnotherapists with the highest level of hypnotherapy training currently recognised by the profession. The AHA has since 1949 worked to raise standards of training and ethical practice in our profession and has done so with the aim that the best possible service be provided to consumers.

At present both AHA members and the public are significantly disadvantaged by health fund policy, which does not recognise the service hypnotherapists provide while recognising an identical service provided by another professional group. Whilst the historical reasons for this can be understood, government, the community and the profession have moved on while the health funds unfortunately, have not.

The Australian Hypnotherapists Association receives many letters from consumers confused by the current inconsistency in health fund policy, many angry by not being able to see the Hypnotherapist of their choice without experiencing a financial penalty. The AHA supports competition which results in better service, better health outcomes and lower costs for all consumers as well as the health funds. We also strongly support the concept of a level playing field in the profession so that all hypnotherapy service providers can compete equally.

CONTACT DETAILS

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The AHA is a professional association and would like to be informed of the outcome of the consultation. The AHA would also attend relevant forums in any capital city should these take place.